

The Crisis Approaches a Climax

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The president's speech, soon broadcast world-wide, led the Soviets and Cubans to increase the alert posture of their armed forces. On the 23rd, at Khrushchev's direction, Soviet Defense Minister Rodion Malinovsky put all Soviet forces in a higher state of alert and postponed the release from service of Strategic Rocket Force personnel and submarine crewmen. Castro placed his regular military and naval forces on the highest level of alert and called out the militia, which converged on Guantanamo. Calming one U.S. concern, Soviet forces in East Germany, the Mediterranean, and the Far East made no visible preparations for operations against the NATO nations and America's Asian allies.

The president's address also raised the alarm in Latin American capitals. On the 23rd, representatives of the Organization of American States (OAS), composed of the United States and twenty Latin American countries, gathered in Washington to chart a course of action. Secretary Rusk personally led the U.S. delegation. He asked the organization to support a quarantine of Cuba and to join the United States in demanding the removal of Soviet strategic missiles from the island. In a series of short, pointed statements, the other representatives strongly endorsed the proposed U.S. actions. The final vote was 19 to 0 in favor of the U.S. proposi-



A Royal Canadian Air Force Argus patrol plane and a U.S. Navy P2V Neptune overfly the vast Atlantic Ocean in search of Soviet warships and merchantmen. The involvement of Canadian air and surface units in the Atlantic patrol effort was instrumental to the successful resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

tion, with the Uruguayans abstaining due only to a lack of instructions from their government. The seat for Cuba's representative was empty.

This vote of the OAS, rarely unified on any issue, reflected the seriousness with which the member nations viewed the external threat to the Western Hemisphere. The Kennedy administration was surprised but pleased by the organization's vote. Khrushchev was dismayed. He thought that long-standing anti-American feeling in some Latin American countries would prevent concerted OAS action. In fact, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Venezuela even of-

fered to provide naval forces for the quarantine, and another six nations volunteered use of their airfields and ports.

Canadian armed forces, with some British units attached, also joined in the defense of the hemisphere. Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) elements of the North American Air Defense Command went to the Canadian equivalent of Defense Condition 3 on 24 October.

Additionally, this alert level mandated the establishment of an antisubmarine patrol barrier in the Atlantic. Normally, that line would have extended from Greenland to Iceland and then to the

United Kingdom—the so-called “GIUK Gap.” The concentration of U.S. naval forces in southern waters during October 1962, however, left too few units available to set up a GIUK barrier. As a result, Admiral Taylor, Commander Anti-Submarine Forces, Atlantic Fleet, established a patrol line further south in the Atlantic. This line covered the 600 miles of ocean between Cape Race on Newfoundland to an area 300 miles north-

west of the Azores. A force of ten U.S. and two British submarines, HMS *Alderney* and HMS *Astute*, the latter boats under Canadian control, helped form that barrier. Overhead were U.S. Navy P2V Neptunes and RCAF Argus patrol aircraft. Because of their greater range, the Canadian aircraft overflew the far end of the line. At any one time, three of the Canadian planes were on station conducting missions, twenty

hours long, from takeoff to landing.

Later in the crisis, Canadian Rear Admiral Kenneth Dyer agreed to Admiral Taylor's request that Argus patrol planes take over the Quonset Point Patrol east of Rhode Island so American planes

Willard Keith (DD 775) cuts through the waters of the Atlantic during 1962. This sleek combatant, commissioned during World War II, was typical of the *Allen M. Sumner*-class destroyers that did yeoman service on the quarantine line off Cuba.

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could deploy to the ASW barrier or to Key West. In addition, Royal Canadian Navy escort ships released American forces from their surveillance of the George's Bank area.

On the evening of 23 October, President Kennedy announced that the quarantine of Cuba would begin at 1000 EDT on 24 October. International shipping was advised to avoid the waters around Cuba. Later communications

established how "unidentified submerged submarines" were to operate in the "general vicinity of Cuba." To be regarded as nonthreatening, once U.S. warships dropped harmless sound signals, undersea vessels were to surface and head due east.

To monitor submarine movements and the flow of merchant shipping to and from Cuba, Admiral Dennison established a Quarantine Plot in his Norfolk headquarters.

Information contained in situation summaries kept the Pentagon and the task force commanders apprised of the location of various suspect vessels.

To carry out the quarantine the Navy assembled east of Cuba under Task Force 136, a formidable armada of an ASW carrier, two cruisers, 22 destroyers, and two guided missile frigates. This included the Newport-based Destroyer Squadron 24, one of the

Willard Keith: Destroyer on the Quarantine Line

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, 20 or more U.S. Navy destroyers served on the two quarantine lines, "Walnut" and "Chestnut," as part of Task Group 136.1. Of these ships, 14 were either *Allen M. Sumner* (DD 692) or *Gearing* (DD 710)-class destroyers.

Both classes were built as part of the 2,200-ton destroyer program of 1942. The ships were capable of 32 knots. They originally carried six dual-purpose, 5-inch guns, 10 21-inch torpedo tubes, two stern racks and six side launchers for depth charges, and 12 40mm and 11 20mm antiaircraft guns. The only substantial difference between the two destroyer types was the greater length of the *Gearing* class, which allowed them increased fuel storage and, therefore, greater range.

Ships of these two classes formed the core of the Navy's destroyer force during the decade after World War II. The Navy continued to improve these vessels throughout their service life. *Willard Keith* (DD 775), pictured here in early 1962, displays the changes made during the 1950s. She retains all of her 5-inch guns, but six more-modern, 3-inch, rapid-fire guns have replaced her 20mm and 40mm antiaircraft guns. Only one stern rack of fast-sinking depth char-

ges remains of her earlier antisubmarine weapons suite, but two new fixed Hedgehog projectors have been installed on both sides of gun mount 52. The ship also carries a pair of Mark 32 lightweight, triple-tube antisubmarine weapons placed between the stacks (hidden in this photo by the support for the starboard 3-inch gun) which replaced the old quintuple bank of 21-inch tubes.

The destroyer's fire controls include a Mark 37 gun director with a Mark 25 antenna dish for the 5-inch guns, Mark 56 and 63 directors for the 3-inch guns, and a Mark 105 antisubmarine warfare director. *Willard Keith* operates an SPS-6 air search radar and an SPS-10 surface search radar. Her sonar is an improved SQS-4 of the SQS-29/32 series.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Willard Keith* steamed in Destroyer Squadron 22. She deployed on quarantine line "Walnut" on 24 October as an escort to the fleet flagship, heavy cruiser *Newport News* (CA 148). Under the command of Commander Claude L. Tyler, *Willard Keith* served on quarantine duty until 15 November 1962. Tyler and his crew received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for their service during the crisis.

Navy's most modern ASW units and composed of *Blandy* (DD 943), *Barry* (DD 933), *Keppler* (DD 765), and *Charles S. Sperry* (DD 697).

In late October, there were at least five Soviet submarines of the Foxtrot class operating in the Atlantic.

Supporting these warships were the tanker *Terek*, a refrigerator ship, and the intelligence trawler *Shkval*.

Because Soviet submarines constituted the greatest threat to the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, Admiral Anderson ordered that their activities be closely monitored. Furthermore, U.S. naval units would be prepared to sink the Soviet ships on command from higher authority.

The day after the president's speech, in the Atlantic and bound for Cuba were 26 Soviet and Eastern Bloc merchant and passenger ships, including 18 Soviet freighters. The freighter *Leninsky Komso-mol* was already well inside the quarantine line. The ship carried as many as thirteen Il-28 Beagle bombers crated and on deck. American intelligence determined that another seven ships probably carried military cargo. The large hatch and spacious hold of one of these vessels, *Pol-tava*, made her ideally suited to transporting missiles below decks. Photographs taken by patrol aircraft also discovered that the ship carried as deck cargo strange rings mounted on trucks. Intelligence specialists soon decided that these objects were support rings for

the SS-5 IRBM.

Admiral Anderson ordered the heavy cruiser *Newport News* (CA 148) and two destroyers to intercept the merchantman and to prepare to stop and board her precisely at 1000 on the 24th, if so directed. CNO signaled the same instructions to the guided missile cruiser *Canberra* (CAG 2), then steaming to intercept *Kimovsk*, another suspected weapons carrier.

By the afternoon of 24 October, information obtained from Navy patrol ships and aircraft, and other intelligence sources, made it clear that 16 of the Soviet ships in the Atlantic were dead in the water or had come about and were steaming for home. Although the operation was less than eight hours old, Anderson could report that most of the Soviet ships would not cross the Navy's quarantine line.

Not all Soviet ships had turned back, however. The tanker *Bucharest*, obviously carrying no weapons, pressed on toward Cuba. As directed by the Pentagon, Admiral Ward positioned destroyers to intercept her. President Kennedy, concluding that Khrushchev wanted to avoid a confrontation on the line, however, directed the Navy to shadow the ship but not stop her. Eventually, *Bucharest* identified herself to the destroyer *Gearing* and slowed down so the Americans could visually inspect and photograph her. The Soviet vessel was then allowed to proceed

to Cuba.

Of a more serious nature, on the afternoon of the 24th, fleet antisubmarine units detected a Soviet submarine, which they labeled contact C-18, 400 miles north of Puerto Rico and inside the quarantine line.

The day witnessed another dramatic development. Air Force General Thomas S. Power, commander of SAC, put his forces on Defense Condition 2, one step short of general, global war. One out of every eight B-52s went on airborne alert, and all ICBMs were put on-line. Because SAC headquarters sent out the alert messages in the clear, Soviet officials knew immediately of the U.S. action. Since Power did not clear the order with the Department of Defense, however, Washington did not know he had taken this step. Twenty years after the crisis, Secretary of Defense McNamara and National Security Advisor Bundy claimed that they were unaware of the heightened SAC alert.

International tension mounted on 25 October as U.S. and Soviet representatives came to grips in the United Nations. Soviet Ambassador Valerian Zorin challenged U.S. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson to present evidence of Soviet offensive missiles in Cuba. The usually restrained Stevenson responded, "Do you, Ambassador Zorin, deny that the USSR has placed and is placing medium and intermediate-

range missiles and sites in Cuba? Yes or no—**don't wait for the translation**—yes or no!" When Zorin promised an answer sometime later, Stevenson shot back that he was prepared to "wait for my answer until hell freezes over." The U.S. representative then displayed to a hushed Security Council enlarged photos of the Soviet installations in Cuba. The evidence of Soviet activity, and deception, was clear to the assembled diplomats.

Meanwhile, on the quarantine line, HUK Task Group 83.2 (Task Group Alfa), formed around ASW carrier *Randolph* (CVS 15) and seven destroyers, had located another Soviet submarine. This one, designated C-19, was 150 miles outside the exclusionary zone and although sub-

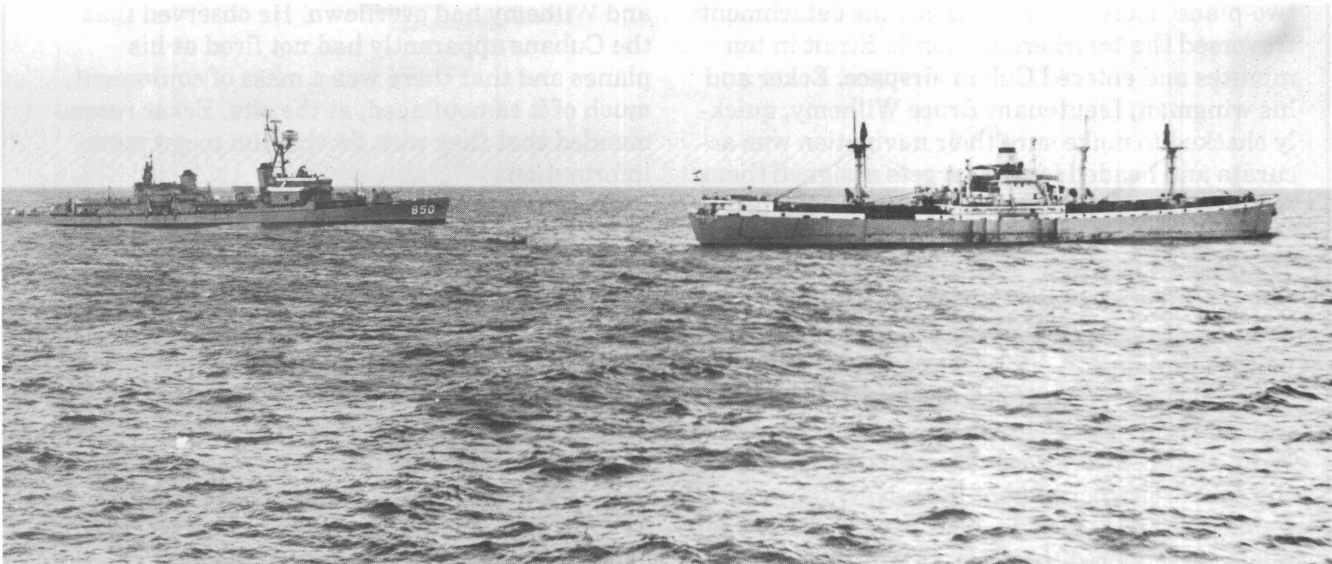
merged, was heading east. Ships and aircraft from the task group maintained contact with the submarine to make sure she kept on an out-bound course.

That evening, the EXCOM decided to stop and search one of the merchantmen making for Cuba to demonstrate American resolve. They selected the Lebanese-flagged freighter *Marucla*, contracted to carry Soviet goods to Cuba. Because U.S. intelligence specialists knew that the Soviet government did not move weapons in Western or neutral ships, the EXCOM felt this boarding was unlikely to be resisted. Planes from *Essex* located the ship, while destroyers *John R. Pierce* (DD 753) and *Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.*, (DD 850) closed her position.

At 0650 the following morning, 26 October, *Kennedy* asked *Marucla* to heave to, which she did. A boarding party of four U.S. naval officers and one signalman from the crews of the two destroyers was welcomed aboard by the merchantman's captain. The American sailors reviewed the ship's manifests and inspected the cargo. Finding no contraband onboard, the U.S. command allowed *Marucla* to continue her passage to Cuba. More importantly, the point was made that the United States intended to enforce the quarantine.

Also that day, American ships and patrol planes picked up two Soviet submarines on their radars. ASW Task Group Alfa located one, labeled C-20, well inside the

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A boat bearing a boarding party makes its way from the destroyer *Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.* (DD 850), named for the president's older brother killed in World War II, to the Lebanese freighter *Marucla*. The Kennedy administration chose to board and search this merchantman on 26 October as a demonstration to Moscow that any ship en route to Cuba was subject to inspection by the quarantine force.

Navy Photoreconnaissance Mission

Soon after U-2 high-flying aircraft brought back the startling information that Khrushchev intended to install offensive missiles in Cuba, the president's chief advisors called for more detailed intelligence of Soviet and Cuban forces and activities on the island. At Washington's direction, Admiral Robert L. Dennison, Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Command, ordered the deployment to Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida, of six planes from the Navy's Light Photographic Squadron (VFP) 62, nicknamed "Fightin' Photo." Commander William B. Ecker, a combat veteran of World War II, led the unit, which consisted of over 500 officers and men and 26 F8U-1P Crusader photoreconnaissance planes. Two-plane sections of the squadron normally served on each of the Atlantic Command's five attack aircraft carriers.

Shortly after the squadron's 19 October arrival at Key West, situated less than 100 miles from Cuba, Ecker received orders to initiate low-level photoreconnaissance missions over the island. Crusaders piloted by Ecker and five other naval aviators took off from the naval facility on the 23rd for the first mission. Flying in three, two-plane "loose deuce" sections, the detachment traversed the treacherous Florida Strait in ten minutes and entered Cuban airspace. Ecker and his wingman, Lieutenant Bruce Wilhemy, quickly checked to make sure their navigation was accurate and headed for the targets assigned them. Approaching the site at 350 knots and 400 feet off the ground, the pilots switched on their cameras. In less than 30 seconds, the jets streaked over the target area, their onboard equipment recorded the scene below, and they banked for home.

The aerial photographic mission, however, was far from over. Instead of landing at Key West, the six aircraft set down further north at the squadron's permanent base, Naval Air Station, Cecil Field, Florida, near Jacksonville. The pilots surrendered their film to waiting photographer's mates who rushed it to nearby facilities for processing. The squadron executive

officer, Commander Bob Koch, also known as "Daddy Photo," supervised the development and initial interpretation of the pictures and later dispatched them to Washington.

Still in his plane, Ecker was ordered to proceed immediately to the nation's capital. Flying at Mach .8, the F8U-1P soon arrived at Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington. A helicopter then whisked him to the Pentagon where, still in his flight suit but relieved of his side arm, he was taken in secret to a high security area. To the surprise of the Navy commander, General Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and Admiral George W. Anderson, Chief of Naval Operations, appeared and ushered him into the JCS meeting room, the "tank."

Ecker apologized for being sweaty and smelly, which prompted General Curtis LeMay, the gruff Air Force Chief of Staff, to interject, "God damn it, you've been flying an airplane now haven't you? You ought to sweat and smell. Sit down."

Thereafter, Ecker described to the assembled chiefs his firsthand impressions of the site he and Wilhemy had overflown. He observed that the Cubans apparently had not fired at his planes and that there was a mass of equipment, much of it camouflaged, at the site. Ecker recommended that they wait for the film to get more information.

The intelligence return from this and subsequent VFP-62 missions over Cuba proved vital to U.S. decision makers. The president and his advisors received timely information on the location, installation status, and later the removal of missiles and bombers from the island. In recognition of the squadron's stellar performance during the crisis, President John F. Kennedy personally presented Ecker with the Navy Unit Commendation. In addition, Ecker, along with 11 other VFP-62 pilots and four attached Marine Corps aviators, received the Distinguished Flying Cross for their flights over Cuba.